

VZCZCXRO8986
OO RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHMOS
DE RUEHKUK #0076/01 0901530
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O R 311530Z MAR 06
FM REO KIRKUK
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0588
RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD IMMEDIATE 0552
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE
RUEHKUK/REO KIRKUK 0616

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KIRKUK 000076

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

BAGHDAD FOR POL, POLMIL, NCT, USAID, IRMO, ROL COORDINATOR

E.O. 12958: DECL: 3/31/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [KISL](#) [PINR](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: HALABJAH: PM BARZANI BLAMES THE PUK

REF: (A) KIRKUK 69, (B) BRITISH CG'S MARCH 29 LETTER TO PM BARZANI (E-MAILED TO EMBASSY BAGHDAD POLITICAL SECTION)

KIRKUK 00000076 001.2 OF 002

CLASSIFIED BY: Scott Dean, Acting Regional Coordinator, , REO
Kirkuk, DoS.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY. With RC(A) March 29, KRG-Erbil PM Barzani blamed the PUK for the heavy-handed response by the KRG-Sulaymaniyah to the Halabjah riot. Barzani said the PUK had known about the growing tension, but had done nothing to stem it. The PUK had undertaken many projects in Halabjah, but they did not have enough PR effect. The PUK had built new apartments instead of paving the main road. Barzani also pointed to Islamist instigators, but did not elaborate. The British Consul General pressed KRG-S PM Omar Fattah on March 27 about human rights violations in the wake of Halabjah. The Kurds said the PUK Politburo would decide whom the KRG-S would charge out of the 40-50 people the KRG-S had detained. The CG responded this was not for a party organization to decide. The CG suggested that the KRG promise to charge detainees swiftly and allow NGO's access. The CG believes that the KRG realizes it has made a mistake and is now looking to clean up the mess. END INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY.

REGIONAL COORDINATOR MEETS WITH PM BARZANI

12. (C) RC(A) raised with Barzani the heavy-handed response by the Sulaymaniyah Kurdistan Regional Government to the March 16 riot in Halabjah. RC(A) pointed out it had hurt the KRG's human rights image. He explained that, while violent protest was criminal, those detained should be charged or released and that journalists should be allowed to cover news events.

13. (C) In response, PM Barzani complained that supporters from his own Kurdistan Democratic Party were among those beaten. He blamed the whole incident on the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan. (NOTE: The PUK dominates the KRG-S.) He said the PUK had known for 3-4 weeks about the growing tension: organizers had declared publicly they would not allow foreign diplomats to attend the March 16 ceremony. The PUK had suffered earlier protests in Kalar, Kifri, Ranya and even Kou Senjaq, which the PUK considered its stronghold. Despite this, the PUK had done nothing to head off the Halabjah protest. By contrast, Barzani said that after the Erbil governor had called him March 28 to say that some IDP's might protest, he as PM had agreed to meet with them to forestall a demonstration. The PUK should have promised Halabjah assistance before the riot instead of sending a "parade of ministers" now to promise it.

14. (C) More broadly, Barzani said, parties had raised people's expectations too high. The PUK had undertaken many projects in Halabjah, but they did not have enough PR effect. They had built new apartments instead of paving the main road. Barzani also pointed to Islamist instigators as one cause of the riot, but did not elaborate.

BRITISH CONSUL GENERAL MEETS WITH KRG-S PM FATTAH

15. (C) The British Consul General, Colin Crorkin, met with KRG-S PM Omar Fattah on March 27 to press human rights complaints. The CG asked how many people the KRG-S intended to charge of the 40-50 they had detained. The Kurds said they did not yet know: the PUK Politburo was to meet March 28 to decide. The CG responded this was not for a party organization to decide. He pointed out that the KRG had had a week's warning about the protests and thus should have been able to have adequate security forces on hand. The Kurds answered that they allowed protest; the British CG noted that the only allowed protests were PUK sponsored. The CG suggested to Mohammad Ihsan, the KRG Human Rights Minister, that the KRG issue a

statement promising to charge detainees swiftly and allow NGO's access. The CG also gave an shorter version of the same presentation to KRG-E minister Falah Bakir March 29. The CG believes that the KRG realizes it has made a mistake and is now looking to clean up the mess.

16. (SBU) The British CG sent a "personal" letter to Fattah March 29 to follow up. REO e-mailed the complete letter to Embassy Baghdad POL; extracts follow.

BEGIN EXTRACTS.

(2) ... There are enough articles about... alleged subsequent treatment of journalists and protestors to give cause for concern.... (The letter then references media reports that PUK officials have threatened the death penalty.) You made clear

KIRKUK 00000076 002.2 OF 002

that the death penalty would not be applied... I am also concerned about reports from a number of journalists about the manner in which they were treated by security officials: these include beatings and theft of property. However, of most concern is the detention of between 30 and 50 individuals (figures agreed by PUK spokespersons)... who have yet to be charged.

(3) There is also the case of the Hawlati journalist, Hawez Hawezi, who was arrested on 17 March for apparently writing an article that was critical of the ruling party and politicians. You explained that he was actually detained for inciting people to riot but others claim that he was within the law and merely exercising his right as a journalist. In any event, no charges were brought against him despite him being detained for three days.

(4) ... (T)hose responsible for criminal acts should be charged and be held accountable for their actions. This process needs to be transparent and accountable, and any sentences should be proportionate to the offences for which an individual is found guilty... However, it is not reasonable to detain people for lengthy periods without any charges being brought. Such behaviour, if true, does not indicate a society that has respect for individual's rights or has an awareness of social justice and civil protection.

(6) You said during our meeting that many of the laws in the Kurdish region date from the Ba'athist era and that you would welcome help in modernising your regional laws. This is an area where I am sure we can be of assistance....

END EXTRACTS.

COMMENT

16. (C) Protestors have alleged that the KRG purposefully did not make front-and-center improvements to Halabjah (such as paving the main road) specifically in order to show it still needed continuing foreign assistance. We doubt any American court would find the Hawlati article an incitement to riot.
ORESTE